

**Environmental Quality Incentive Program Delivery in
Southern Aroostook County, Maine
First Application Evaluation and Ranking Period of FY 2015**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers financial assistance to agricultural producers to implement on-farm conservation practices. Eligibility is determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Eligible producers may apply for financial assistance on conservation practices that will address identified resource concerns on eligible land.

Interested agricultural producers may apply in person at the Houlton USDA Service Center. Applicants may also request EQIP assistance by telephone, FAX, e-mail, or letter. Send to: Helena Swiatek, District Conservationist, 304 North Street, Houlton, Maine 04730, phone number (207) 532-2087 extension 3, Fax number (207) 532-4379, or email Helena.Swiatek@me.usda.gov.

Objective: The objective of the Southern Aroostook County Local Work Group is to utilize EQIP to promote the use of conservation practices to benefit the environment while promoting sustainable agriculture and maintaining open farmland.

Priority Resource Concerns: In Southern Aroostook County, the Local Work Group (LWG) has identified and prioritized the following resource concerns:

Soil Quality and Nutrient Management continue to remain a high priority in Southern Aroostook County. This concern is intimately connected to soil erosion, soil quality, and surface and ground water quality. Practices such as crop rotation, reduced-tillage, cover and mulching will be utilized to address the soil quality issues. In addition, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP's) will be developed and implemented to positively impact water quality.

Forest Resources, High tunnels and Conservation on Grazing land have been ranked as a medium priority in the area. Implementing practices such as forest stand improvement and prescribed grazing will protect water quality and provide for wildlife habitat. The promotion of forest management and grazing plans is also of concern to the Local Work Group.

Wildlife habitat is a low priority in Southern Aroostook County. While there is a continued need to provide wildlife habitat for birds, small animals, fish and other species, these applications will be addressed with the WHIP program.

Priority habitats include Deer Wintering Areas, Early Successional Habitats and Fish Passage.

Eligible Practices and Payment Rates: For a list of practices eligible for EQIP financial assistance in fiscal year 2015, see **Southern Aroostook County Eligible Practice Eligible Practices and Payment Rate List.**

Sign-up: All program sign-up is continuous and applications may be taken at any time. Sign-up will be conducted according to local priorities and grouped along the lines of the resource areas that the State Technical Committee defined and that the LWG have recommended be funded in 2015.

For each funding cycle, a cutoff date will be established to provide time for screening and ranking. Applications received after the cutoff date will be considered for the next funding cycle.

Conservation practices (both structural and management) in Forestland will be eligible for inclusion in a cost share contract only when a Forest Stewardship Plan, or other forest management plan that meets the State of Maine Stewardship Plan standard, has been developed for the acres to be enrolled in the program. Applications involving animal waste management such as waste storage facilities, milking center waste water treatment system, and heavy use area protection require the development of a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP) prior to funding. There may be opportunities for financial assistance to obtain these specific types of plans. Landowners should contact the office to request assistance and information.

Ranking: All eligible applications received prior to the funding cycle cutoff date will be screened. Those determined to be High and Medium priority will be ranked based on an on-site resource inventory and assessment. Planners will develop alternative measure to address resource concerns based on their assessment and work with the applicant to come to decisions for practice application. Ranking will be based on the decisions the applicant makes for addressing the resource concerns.

The combined ranking sheet for Southern Aroostook County, which incorporates resource concerns and applicable quality criteria from the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide is the basis for ranking applications. A single combined ranking sheet will be completed for each farm or planning/contract area. Points will be assigned for those resource concerns that are not meeting quality criteria in the benchmark condition and will be improved as a result of implementation of the client's contract.

Applications will be selected for contracting in ranked order by resource area, according to the score, as available funds allow. If available funds are insufficient to contract all eligible applications, applications may be held (deferred) and considered for funding with any subsequently received applications during FY 2015 if another application ranking period is announced.

Funding: Periodic requests for program allocations will be scheduled throughout the year as funding permits. Separate program requests will be submitted by the District Conservationist according to the resource areas that the State Technical Committee

defined and that the LWG has recommended be funded in 2015. Each of these requests will constitute a separate pool of ranked applications.

Allocation decisions to each Field Office will be made in the State Office based on national, state and local priorities, and the nature and extent of requests. Field Office Allocations will be split between each of the resource categories based on percentages set by the LWG, as shown below. Unfunded applications will be deferred to the next program request date.

Fund Pools: The Southern Aroostook County Local Work Group has decided to allocate the available EQIP funds as follows for the first Application Evaluation and Ranking Period of FY2015:

2015 EQIP Funding Pool Category	Percent of FO Allocation
Cropland (includes hayland)	57
Pasture	5
Animal Waste	28
Forestry	5
High Tunnels	5
Wildlife*	0
Water Use Conservation**	0

* Wildlife concerns are of importance to the LWG, however it is assumed that all wildlife projects will be funneled through an EQIP wildlife state wide pool in 2015.

**Additional funding available through the Irrigation Special Initiative.

If you have any questions about how EQIP will be delivered in Southern Aroostook County, please contact Helena Swiatek, District Conservationist at (207) 532-2087 ext 3.